New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1949

Volume X, Number 1 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of January 17, 1949

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NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK STAR — NEW YORK SUN

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Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by Critics' Theatre Reviews, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Along Fifth Avenue"

Daily Mirror

JANUARY 14, 1949

'Along Fifth Ave.' Bright, New Sock Revue

By ROBERT COLEMAN

With Maurice Chevalier returning to France, impresario Arthur Lesser found a little time on his hands and decided to produce a smart musical revue. Reports from the hinterlands indicate that Lesser had a goodly quota of headaches during the early stages of this new venture, but being a courageous and resourceful fellow he refused to let them down him.

So, last evening, "Along Fifth Avenue" arrived at the Broadhurst and proved, for us at least, one of the brighest and most amusing musicals of recent seasons. The last few semesters have given us shows that are clever, cute and significant, but they failed to provide a sufficiently robust workout for our funny-bone.

"Along Fifth Avenue" reminds us of the good old days, when producers weren't afraid to make the customers howl. It boasts three hilarious skits: "Sweet Surrender," a satire on fancy perfume shops; "The Fifth Avenue Label," wherein an accident hound finds a dream case for a suit; and "What's in the Middle?", a teapot tempest in a classy cafeteria.

With these for a starter, Gordon Jenkins, Tom Adair, Richard Stutz, Milton Pascal, Nat Hiken and Charles Sherman go to town with catchy songs, novelty numbers and topical comments.

Nancy Walker and Jackie Gleason romp merrily and triumphantly through the laugh sequences, though Miss Walker appeared to be somewhat handicapped by a bad throat. Gleason had the first-nighters roaring with "The Fugitive From Fifth Avenue," a sophisticated chanson of how a Damon Runyonesque character came to join the Foreign Legion.

Hank Ladd also won a harvest of palm pats with droll and dead-pan observations on the show and current events. He is best of the suave emcees, since Jack Benny deserted the boards of the Winter Garden. Carol Bruce and Donald Richards do full justice to the score. Miss Bruce has authority, style and good looks. Richards is personable and has a voice that would be at home in light opera.

Viola Essen, a lovely ballerina, and Johnny Coy, a spirited tapster, head Robert Sidney's talented corps de danse. They stopped the proceedings and took several encores after "Challenge," a contest between a toe-shoe artiste and a hot hoofer.

Others meriting salutes are Virginia Gorski, Judyth Burroughs, Joyce Matthews, Dick Bernie, George S. Irving, Zachary Solov, Lee Krieger, Wallace Seibert and Louise Kirtland.

The sets by Oliver Smith, and the costumes by David Ffolkes are opulent and tasteful.

"Along Fifth Avenue" offers a pleasant place to spend an evening. It is gay, tuneful and funpacked. It is peopled with performers who seemed to like entertaining us as much as we liked being entertained. We had a wonderful time.

'ALONG FIFTH AVENUE'

A revue, with music by Gordon Jenkins; lyrics by Tom Adair; additional music and lyrics by Richard Stutz, Milton Pascal and Nat Hiken; sketches by Charles Sherman and Nat Hiken; scenery by Oliver Smith; lighting by Peggy Clark; costumes by David Ffolkes; vocal coaching by Robert Lenn; musical and vocal arrangements by Gordon Jenkins; musical director, Irving Actman; dances and musical numbers staged by Robert Sidney; presented by Arthur Lesser at the Broadhurst Theatre, January 13, 1949. The players: Nancy Walker, Hank Ladd, Carol Bruce, Jackie Gleason, Donald Richards, Viola Essen, Johnny Coy, Virginia Gorski, Judyth Burroughs, Joyce Matthews, Lee Krieger, Dick Bernie, George S. Irving, Zachary Solov, Wallace Seibert and Louise Kirkland.

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 14, 1949

'Along Fifth Avenue' Has Its High Spots and Its Holes, Like a Street

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Arthur Lesser's revue, "Along Fifth Avenue," is somewhere between the smart and classy and the lowdown and rowdy. It has enough stuff, what with droves of sketch writers and singers and comedians, to make one show of each kind, and the first audience at the Broadhurst Theatre last evening applauded it all. My own feeling was that all it needed was somebody to pull it together.

The material is there — some funny skits, a song or two with charm, the hardworking Nancy Walker heading a friendly company, a nicely cynical lyric now and then, good dancing and handsome dancers directed by Robert Sidney, and fine settings by a specialist in the Manhattan scene, Oliver Smith. But it is sprawling rather than compact, uncertain where it should be concise. Instead of being an extraordinarily pleasant revue, it is an ordinarily pleasant one.

Miss Walker Earns Pay.

Miss Walker devotes her great energies to playing such Fifth Avenue types as a salesgirl at a perfume counter and a counter girl at a cafeteria. She delivers a fine burlesque of the "My Man" or "Bill" type of song, and she is hilarious in a takeoff of the South American number which now must be found in any musical, whether it is set on Fifth Avenue or at Oxford College.

Jackie Gleason works up some laughs as an automobile accident victim and sings a reasonably funny set of verses explaining why he has joined the French Foreign Legion. Hank Ladd appears now and then to kid the show or the producer and tell a joke, much as he did in "Angel in the Wings," and Carol Bruce, a very fine lady baritone, utters sundry melodious laments.

A Charming Song.

Naturally there is a number in which some store-window mannequins come alive and dance—and it is a charming dance. There is a capital scene in which department store employes take a vacation right in the shop, helping themselves to all they need from the shelves. My own two favorites in "Along Fifth Avenue" are a dance by Viola Essen and Johnny Coy and a really enchanting little song, "A Trip Doesn't Care at All," written by Philip Kadison and Thomas Howell and performed by Donald Richards and a cute and sassy little Negro girl, Judyth Burroughs.

Others involved in writing the songs and sketches of "Along Fifth Avenue" are Gordon Jenkins, Tom Adair, Richard Stutz, Milton Pascal, Nat Hiken, Mel Tolkin, Max Liebman, Mel Pahl, Charles Sherman and Rick French. Laid end to end, they reach from Washington Square to Harlem.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 14, 1949

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Hardly Fifth Avenue

A RAMBLING and rowdy revue has brought more talent than material to the Broadhurst. "Along Fifth Avenue" finds Nancy Walker and Jackie Gleason struggling with sketches that are no more than extended black-outs; Carol Bruce and Donald Richards chanting some uninspired and frequently vulgar ditties, and Hank Ladd delivering interminable monologues. The few glittering moments in the show are contributed by the dancers, headed by Viola Essen and Johnny Coy. The latter are first-rate, particularly in a duet contrasting the techniques of a ballerina and a hoofer. They do not succeed in carrying an undistinguished musical. There may have been a director of the production, but he has failed to claim credit. That is understandable.

• • •

For "Along Fifth Avenue" sprawls through some twenty-four scenes with a minimum of pace and almost no routining. Sketches and songs are sometimes alternated, with Ladd chatting aimlessly to the audience when scene changes are necessary. There is a big production number called "Santo Dinero" to bring down the first-act curtain, but it has all the appearances of an afterthought. Style is badly wanting in the offering, for all the promise of its title. Aside from some random clowning by the principals and a striking ballet, "Skyscraper Blues," it is a long and tedious example of a form which demands precision and sustained exuberance.

• • •

While no one will accept responsibility for the staging, there are quite a number of collaborators on the songs and sketches. Gordon Jenkins has composed most of the music, with "Skyscraper Blues," "Weep No More" and "Chant d'Amour" the most effective of the tunes. Tom Adair has thought up the bulk of the lyrics. Richard Stutz, Milton Pascal, Nat Hiken, Mel Pahl and Philip Kadison are some of the others responsible for words and music. Charles Sherman and Hiken can be chided for the skits, with Mel Tolkin and Max Liebman as accessories. The boys didn't get together very well on "Along the Avenue."

• • •

Miss Walker and Gleason wrest some fugitive fun out of sorry material. The former practically knocks herself out in the South American number and a sketch called "Murder on Fifth Avenue." Gleason submits to having a pie slapped in his face in a cafeteria black-out. Perhaps he never saw any early films. Miss Bruce is at her best in "Weep No More" and Virginia Gorski and Judyth Burroughs are on hand to push the lumbering doings along. It is the dancers under Robert Sidney's supervision who succeed best in giving "Along Fifth Avenue" the semblance of a big-time revue. It is no more than a semblance.

Journal American

JANUARY 14, 1949

An Always Danceful And Good Musical

By ROBERT GARLAND

During one of his eager explanations at the Broadhurst, Hank Ladd, a man who explains in front of a curtain while the scenery changes in back of it, explains that "Along Fifth Avenue" is the first of a series of such musical revues.

If all goes well—and it looks as if it might—the new Arthur Lesser song-and-dance show will be followed by "Along Sixth Avenue," "Along Seventh Avenue," "Along Eighth Avenue" and so on until Twelfth, even Thirteenth, Avenue has been glorified.

Which, as Mr. Ladd goes on to say, is certainly the hard way to get to New Jersey. And it mightn't be a very good idea, at that. For "Along Fifth Avenue" is at its best when it sticks to the thoroughfare from which it takes its title.

That's for the larger part of the evening. Only at the end of the opening stanza do cast and chorus wander afield, going, for no apparent reason, to some far flung Algerian outpost and returning by way of Santo Dinero, Any Man's Land and Broadway.

"Santo Dinero" is the less reasonable. Following "Badaroma" in "Small Wonder," "Pernambuco" in "Where's Charley" and "Santo Domingo" in "Lend an Ear," there is neither fun nor feeling for such a wandering-off into all-too-familiar places.

"Along Fifth Avenue" should linger along Fifth Avenue!

• • •

Up and Back

When "Along Fifth Avenue" does linger along Fifth Avenue, it covers its beat from the Washington Arch to Harlem. Beginning on the Public Library steps with a choral called "Fifth Avenue," it works its way back where it begins.

Making the downtown-uptown circuit, it stops off for singing, dancing and funny-business at Elizabeth Arden's, Lord and Taylor's, the Fifth Avenue Hospital, Radio City, an apartment facing Central Park, and, at either end, a park bench and a doorstep.

It's on that Harlem doorstep, well toward the evening's end, that the most engaging moments of "Along Fifth Avenue" are found. There, a little colored girl named Judyth Burroughs and a big uncolored man named Donald Richards take over.

The number is "A Trip Doesn't Care at All." And little Miss Burroughs and big Mr. Richards make a happy thing of it, endowing Thomas Howell's lyrics and Philip Kadison's music with more than, without them, might meet the ear and eye.

Other songs you may soon be hearing are "The Best Time of Day" and "Weep No More," sung by Carol Bruce, "Skyscraper Blues" and "Vacation in the Store," sung by Mr. Richards and "If This Is Glamour" and "Chant D'Amour," sung by Nancy Walker.

And "I Love Love in New York." But I don't say positively!

• • •

Murder, Pies, Etc.

The sketches, mostly by Charles Sherman, are more off than onish. They have to do with the power of perfume, an automobile accident, a fugitive from Fifth Avenue, an opening night on Broadway, a pie-thrower in a diner and a murder in a swank apartment.

Nancy Walker, now speaking right out loud so you can hear her, takes part in most of these. She's still the Lily Malloy of "Look Ma, I'm Dancin'." Only not so prevalent. Liking or disliking her, as you may, you just can't lump her.

Jackie Gleason helps her with the sketches. With his new look and his old comedic modesty, Mr. Gleason is a wistful sort of funny fellow. His patter song as a fugitive from Fifth Avenue is superior because of his wistfully funny singing.

Viola Essen and Johnny Coy are worthy dancers, especially in "Challenge" which, for one reason or two others, reminds me pleasantly of Michael Kidd's "On Stage." As a matter of fact, "Along Fifth Avenue" is always good and danceful.

And that's about all, save for Oliver Smith's imaginative settings, David Ffolkes' accompanying costumes, Park and Tilford's sugar-coated pie for throwing and the Broadhurst's orchestra under Irving Actman. And Nancy Walker's torch song, "Irving"...

"Along Fifth Avenue" is not too unworthy of its highstreet!

New York Post
HOME NEWS

JANUARY 14, 1949

'Along Fifth Avenue' An Agreeable Revue

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Although it certainly contains nothing sensational in the way of ideas or material, "Along Fifth Avenue," the new revue at the Broadhurst, is a pleasant, lively and entertaining musical show. Its sketches are less than exhibrating, its score is not a masterpiece, and some of its performers are not among my particular heroes and heroines, but there is an air of brightness and gayety about it and it has the immense virtue of getting better as it goes along. I would set it down as providing a friendly and agreeable evening.

It is notorious that first-night reviews of musical shows tend to be merely lists of credits, and this notice will be no exception to that long-standing rule. I shall begin immediately, therefore, with Hank Ladd, whose contribution to the performance seems to me the most valuable of all. This quiet-voiced, straight-faced, saturnine gentleman has an authentic gift for chatting informally with his audience, as everyone who saw him last year in "Angel in the Wings" will remember. He is at it again in "Along Fifth Avenue" and once more he proves conclusively that he is one of the comic finds of recent seasons.

Two Singers

Then there is the beautiful Carol Bruce, who achieved the almost incredible feat, in the recent revival of the classic "Show Boat," of being even finer than the nostalgic memories we old-timers have of the immortal Helen Morgan. Miss Bruce's songs are only so-so, but she does them with characteristic charm and distinction. A second valuable contributor to the singing is Donald Richards, who was last seen in "Finian's Rainbow," wandering among the leprechauns. With his stirring voice, he makes a thrilling number of "Skyscraper Blues."

The dancing in "Along Fifth Avenue" is one of its virtues, and for this Viola Essen, who looks a little like Patricia Morison, and Johnny Coy deserve particular appreciation. There is, in particular, an episode in which Miss Essen, as a ballerina, and Mr. Coy, as an unreconstructed tap dancer, offer amiably contemptuous challenges to each other's art, which is among the high points of the evening. As one who has long been suspicious of pirouettes in musical comedies, I found this number a particularly disarming one.

Two Comics

Getting around to Nancy Walker, no dream girl of mine, I must shamefacedly confess that she still strikes me as less than one of the major comics, but she is certainly amusing when she sings dolefully of the questionable charms of her absent lover, Irving. Opposite her, but not, as Irving, is Jackie Gleason, a comedian concerning whose merits I am not altogether certain. It is my impression that Mr. Gleason is a more valuable performer than the sketches, which are not hilarious, enable him to be, because he is excellent as a dubious member of the Foreign Legion.

There are a number of items worthy of praise, including the sets by Oliver Smith, the costumes by David Ffolkes, the innocent sweetness of a little Negro girl named Judyth Burroughs, the brightness of Virginia Gorski, and a mock love song known as "Call It Applefritters," by Richard Stutz, which no one takes very seriously. "Along Fifth Aveune" is not, in general, a brilliant revue, but it has the pace, good humor and high spirits to make it one of the entertaining shows of the season.

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 14, 1949

Nancy Walker Clowns 'Along Fifth Avenue'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Along Fifth Avenue" has an odd kinship with haphazard prewar Continental revues, and here and now is like a musical Jack Horner pie. You never know what to expect next, and the performers often look pretty startled about being on stage when they are.

The theory seems to have been to save most of the good material for the second act, after giving the first a strong opening and closing and not much in between.

There is a marked reminiscent quality about every number in the show but one or two, and if the results are not as good as the originals, the present items have at least been designed on good models.

Just before the finale there is a sketch that for laughs tops everything on the program. It has to do with an alleged murder, and its carefree attitude is only improved upon by the antics of Nancy Walker. In this case she is told to keep moving as an antidote to poison, and keep moving she does, like a willing seismograph on a rough day, while she answers questions of the police.

She's Always Welcome.

The comedienne is here, there and everywhere, doing star solos or silent walk ons. She talks a man into starvation from behind a lunch counter, or looks inexplicably Egyptian in one of those otherwise ordinary Latin finales that have become so fashionable for revues of all description. She can also sell perfume with a punch, and whatever she does, she is welcome.

Having decided that "Show Boat" is not a career in itself, Carol Bruce is here looking glamorous and modern as she sings with startling variety. She allthers about in front of a male quartet and croons a sorry-for-myself item. She holds her own with the operatic baritone of Donald Richards, and is at her gay best kidding the classic boy-girl number along with Hank Ladd's nasal m.c. vocalizing.

Viola Essen is a ballerina who does not let a crystal clear style subdue her sharp sense of humor, and makes the most of both these gifts in the "Challenge" number in competition with Johnny Coy's tapping.

Hank Ladd Appears.

Things have not been going on long in the revue before Hank Ladd appears and starts, in his ingratiating manner, to kid what has happened before he turned up. He is not on as safe ground as he might be, but knows it, which is all to the good. He sings a couple of numbers in that easy manner of his through his nose, the best of them the psuedo-sophisticated vaudeville act with Miss Bruce.

A streamlined Jackie Gleason is often around to make more of his comic material than anyone could expect.

Donald Richards saves a pretty dull street scene by singing the number richly as if he really cared. He also managed to kid around with beach toys at a department store picnic without getting cute about it, and does right by a wistful little fantasy about travel with the diminutive Judyth Burroughs.

There is not much distinction about the physical production of "Along Fifth Avenue." Much of Gordon Jenkins' music is in the vein of his justly popular "Manhattan Towers," to which nobody can object. From the penmen, Nat Hiken's lyrics, and his and Charles Sherman's sketches offer the brightest moments.

In the end, though, you feel that some very pleasant performers have been left standing on thin ice. Nancy Walker is the best bet not to fall through, but even with her you too often believe that she is holding herself up by her own ice skates through sheer will to win.

The New York Times

JANUARY 14, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Some places "Along Fifth Avenue" are better than others. In the revue by that title, which opened for business at the Broadhurst last evening, most of the best places came in the second act. Nancy Walker, the distaff clown, sings a very funny "Chant D'Amour" to Irving—an objectionable character with whom she professes to be in love. Most of "Along Fifth Avenue" wastes Miss Walker's talent for gunmoll mummery. But her squalid devotion to Irving joggles her funny-bone again, and she has a few hilarious moments fighting off death by poison in "Murder on Fifth Avenue."

• • •

Take note, also, of an enchanting caprice entitled "A Trip Doesn't Care At All," which Donald Richards and pint-size Judyth Burroughs turn into the one lyrical number of the show. Carol Bruce, the blues minstrel, and Hank Ladd, the quizzical patterman, have a gay little tune, "Call It Applefritters," by Richard Stutz, with some jaunty lyrics by Milton Pascal.

Charge to the credit account one original dance turn, "Challenge," in which Viola Essen and Johnny Coy match ballet dancing with hoofing; and an amusingly whimsical song by Mel Tolkin and Max Liebman, "Mr. Rockefeller Builds His Dream House" in Rockefeller Plaza.

• • •

To one slightly discontented theatregoer, these seem to be the most enjoyable places. "Along Fifth Avenue." For the most of the material fitted into the program establishes a high working standard for mediocrity. Technically, the material is new. But it follows the familiar pattern of "Make Mine Manhattan" and "Angel in the Wings," both of which were recent and better, and it has none of the freshness of "Lend an Ear."

Most of the music is by Gordon Jenkins, who has also written the musical and vocal arrangements. And most of the lyrics are by Tom Adair. Credit them with the only good number in the first act, "Skyscraper Blues," which provokes a torch ballet of quality and Oliver Smith's most spectacular scene.

Revues sedulously assembled by hands are likely to have a hackneyed and hodge-podge flavor. "Along Fifth Avenue" is a case in point. Mr. Smith has contributed several agreeable neighborhood scenes, and David Ffolkes has designed contemporary costumes—with less flair, incidentally, than he has for showier periods. The sketches are by Charles Sherman and Nat Hiken. Robert Sidney has staged the dances and musical numbers.

• • •

But nothing about "Along Fifth Avenue" is so notable as the fact that it wastes the services of two comedians. Miss Walker, the most combative female mountebank in the business, generally suffers from lack of original material. Particularly in one colorless number, "If This Is Glamour," she makes the suffering general.

And Jackie Gleason, serving as second buffoon, will starve to death if his diet ever gets much leaner. Mr. Gleason is a cheerful wag with laughing eyes and a droll map. He knows how to inhabit burlesque costumes. He can also move—which is a priceless accomplishment in a man who wants to be funny on the stage. But there seems to be no place "Along Fifth Avenue" where he can let go with the slapstick properly and entertain the customers royally.

NEW YORK STAR

JANUARY 16, 1949

by John Lardner

A Fannie Brice in the Making

There have been worse revues, and many better ones, too, than *Along Fifth Avenue*, which is another way of saying that the show that penetrated the Broadhurst Thursday night ranks somewhere between *The Bandwagon* and *Morey Amsterdam's Hilarities*. Pressed for a closer accounting, I would place it several furlongs nearer to the latter, which is not, as you may remember, a very fragrant neighborhood.

Along Fifth Avenue possesses one asset which has grown in value, to my way of thinking, with each succeeding year, namely, the services of Nancy Walker. This lady may not be ready yet for the mantle of Fannie Brice—I mean the Fannie Brice-in-person of golden memory, quite a different thing from the radio player of recent fame—but she is closing in on it. In the new revue she is better than she was in *Best Foot Forward*, *On the Town*, and *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'*, and she was pretty good in all of those. Her comedy is easier and more natural now than it used to be. Her control is improving. She no longer depends as much as she did on noise, mannerisms, and a high, wide, fast ball.

• • •

To be more specific, Miss Walker makes of her best number, a song called *Chant d'Amour*, by Nat Hiken and Gordon Jenkins, one of the fine moments in the history of musical shows. This song concerns a swain named Irving, who, among other things, switched to Calvert's without giving up Old Crow, and in the hands and throat of Miss Walker it amounts to a very funny burlesque of the school of ballads which produced *My Man* and *Bill*. As a performance, if not as a song, it ranks alongside Miss Brice's *Rose of Washington Square*.

The rest of Miss Walker's material does not match up to this number, though I found her steadily amusing in all her sketches. As a matter of fact, *Along Fifth Avenue* is not a matching-up kind of show. It is mixed and messy, and this situation overwhelms most of the other performers, if not the leading lady. The great Willie Howard, who died last week, was to have headed the male side of the cast. He would have been of immense value to the production, as Jackie Gleason and Hank Ladd, struggling with mediocre prose and rhyme, prove clearly in a roundabout kind of way.

• • •

Officially, *Along Fifth Avenue* has a theme to string it together, i.e., the faubourg for which it is named. However, it strays far and aimlessly out of bounds, and Mr. Ladd, when he points out facetiously that the action has moved some 3000 miles south of Washington Arch to embrace the South American stampede which ends the first act, does not really take the curse of fuddlement off the show.

A whole stable of song-writers, including Mr. Jenkins, Mr. Hiken, Tom Adair, Richard Stutz, and Milton Pascal, has conspired to produce a routine revue score. Mr. Hiken and Charles Sherman stick very close to past form in their sketches, though two or three of these are funnier than the others. Carol Bruce, the athletic torch-singer, and Donald Richards are reasonably melodious. There is a whimsical but pleasant song called *A Trip Doesn't Care at All* (this one by Philip Kadison and Thomas Howell, whom I forgot to mention above), involving a small colored girl named Judyth Burroughs. There is something called *Skyscraper Blues* which emphasizes the old rule of minstrelsy that baritones should not sing alleged blues songs in the manner of baritones singing *On the Road to Mandalay*.

There is also some pretty nifty dancing by Johnny Coy and Viola Essen in a number that fuses taps and ballet. For the benefit of commuters, I will add that Nancy Walker goes into her *Chant d'Amour* routine at approximately 10:30 in the evening.

"Along Fifth Avenue"—*continued*

The Sun

JANUARY 14, 1949

'Along Fifth Avenue,' Musical Revue, Has Premiere at the Broadhurst.

The town's gayety received a nice boost last evening as Arthur Lesser launched his musical revue "Along Fifth Avenue" on the stage of the Broadhurst Theater. His tribute to Manhattan's famous thoroughfare has a jaunty style and, best of all, it's very funny.

Starting somewhat slowly, the show really begins to roll as Donald Richards sings of the "Sayscraper Blues" while Viola Essen and Zachary Solov lead their ballet colleagues through a bit of midtown dance drama against a picturesque background of lighted buildings. A moment later Hank Ladd is stepping before the curtain to explain in his droll manner just what the audience has witnessed, and from there until the finale the swift parade includes some excellent numbers.

Nancy Walker, brassy and grimacing as of yore, ably justifies her starred billing as she wanders in and out, now burlesquing South American rhythms, now acting as a tough counter girl in a cafeteria or portraying the role of a missing witness in a slapstick detective skit. And when she pays her respects to torch singers in her salute to Irving she is a hilarious delight.

She gets good support in the mirth department from Ladd and Jackie Gleason. Lesser and Gleason have replaced the Hartmans as the targets of Ladd's amusing complaints and Ladd contributes one of the evening's high spots as he discloses in song to a group of gaping sightseers just why Rockefeller Center was built. The same goes for Gleason in his "Fugitive From Fifth Avenue" number, for which Nat Hiken has furnished some laugh-provoking lyrics.

In the field of the dance Johnny Coy and Miss Essen pit taps against ballet steps most charmingly in "Challenge" and the whole troupe links color and satire successfully in "Vacation in the Store."

The music of Gordon Jenkins and Richard Stutz is none of it particularly memorable, but their tunes fit into the show effectively and furnish Carol Bruce with several songs that just suit her special and pleasing style. Note should be taken too, definitely, of Philip Kadison's and Thomas Howell's "A Trip Doesn't Care At All" with which Richards and little Judyth Burroughs score heavily.

There is nothing lavish about Oliver Smith's scenery, but it skillfully provides the proper Manhattan background and David Folkes has designed some tasteful costumes.

Plenty of folks in the first night audience obviously had a good time at "Along Fifth Avenue." A lot of others should, too, in the weeks ahead.

HERRICK BROWN.

"The Smile of the World"

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 13, 1949

Candida Goes to Washington in Kanin's 'The Smile of the World'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It is inescapable that one should compare Garson Kanin's new play, "The Smile of the World," with Bernard Shaw's "Candida"—and regrettable that the comparison should be somewhat unfavorable to the new work, which was presented with care by the Playwrights' Company at the Lyceum Theatre last evening.

In devising his play, Mr. Kanin might have wondered how it would be if Candida, after having with great tenderness sent on his way her impassioned young poet, should walk out on her minister husband instead of staying with him because he is the weaker man. So this is what she does—and it does not make too stirring a switch.

There are admirable performances throughout in "The Smile of the World" and the most difficult of them establishes a fairly new young actor, Warren Stevens, as a sensitive player with an instinct for being right. There is good writing, too—direct and simple talk in which all who speak say what is on their minds and in their hearts. There is an ingenious first scene in which the theme of the play is stated.

No Great Emotion.

But for me there is no great emotional depth. Last evening I was not caught up and swept along with the lives of the people involved—so this gave me time to sit back and wonder how a drama which is short and simple should seem talkative.

Mr. Kanin's Candida is the wife of a Justice of the Supreme Court, in 1923. Her young and adoring poet now is a clerk in the Justice's office—chosen for his brilliance in law school and his promise of achievement. Her husband — as was Mr. Shaw's original—is the weaker of the two men.

This Supreme Court Justice was once a rebellious young man; now, in middle age, has become a middle-of-the-roader. He takes the conservative side in judging an imaginary Sacco-Vanzetti case. He has become a realist who believes that the mind, the law and the Constitution should rule the heart. When the new clerk comes to him, his wife sees in the youngster the rebellious young man she once had married—and she falls in love again.

A Very Good Cast.

Mr. Kanin's play is, of course, partly a statement of faith in liberalism—but mainly it concerns itself with the affections and emotions of the three principal characters. I think it would be more exciting if it contained more soap box and less soap opera.

Ruth Gordon plays the wife with tenderness, candor and a graceful presence. Otto Kruger makes a fine stuffed shirt jurist, and Boris Marshalov has a lively and amusing scene as a photographer of celebrities who serves to get the play teed off. Mr. Stevens, as the clerk who falls in love with a middle-aged woman, is worthy of the well-trained company he is keeping. And Laura Pierpont makes the most of a ready-made scene-stealing comedy role as Mr. Kruger's outspoken mother. I'd say that Mother is somewhat related to the late Harry Leon Wilson's Ma Pettingill, and she is funny.

The set is by Donald Oenslager and the play was directed by the author.

'THE SMILE OF THE WORLD'

Play by Garson Kanin. Setting and lighting by Donald Oenslager. Costumes by Mainbocher and Forrest Thayer. Staged by Garson Kanin. Presented by the Playwrights' Company at the Lyceum Theatre, January 12, 1949. The cast:

Josef Boros.....Boris Marshalov
Mrs. Boros.....Elizabeth Dewing
Petey.....Sam Jackson
Evelyn.....Ruby Dee
Sara Boulting.....Ruth Gordon
Sam Fenn.....Warren Stevens
Justice Reuben Boulting.....
Otto Kruger
Stewart.....Ossie Davis
Alice Widmayer...Laura Pierpont

Synopsis: The home of Justice Reuben Boulting on the outskirts of Washington. Act I—October, 1923. Act II—A few months later. Act III—A week later. Afternoon.

Daily Mirror

JANUARY 13, 1949

'Smile of The World' Is Artificial and Stiff

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Garson Kanin has penned "The Smile of the World," which The Playwrights' Company brought to the Lyceum Theatre last evening, with more intelligence than heart. The result is that you may admire it, but it's difficult to like it.

The title is taken from John Morley: "And what is this smile of the world, to win which we are bidden to sacrifice our moral manhood; this frown of the world, than the withering up of truth, and the slow going out of light within the souls of us?"

In dramatizing the quotation, Kanin presents the case of a Supreme Court Justice who had been a fire-eater in his youth, but has become a complacent, intellectual mossback in maturity. He sides with the conservatives on the court, and neglects his younger wife. The wife has lost respect for his opinions, as well as affection for him as a person. So she proceeds to fall in love with the Justice's idealistic young secretary.

The Justice realizes what is happening, but is less concerned with the emotional impact than with public opinion. Though the secretary leaves the Justice's employ and the wife leaves his house, they do so separately, realizing there is something of an age barrier between them.

Only as the wife prepares to depart does the eminent jurist decide to attempt to recapture her early regard for him. There are the materials here for a moving play, but they seldom move you. It is hard to feel sympathy for the three corners of a triangle representing ideas rather than people.

Though Otto Kruger and Ruth Gordon play Justice and Mrs. Reuben Boulting with admirable technical skill, they seldom are able to make them seem other than static. Warren Stevens is more successful, we think, with the role of the impetuous young secretary. And it is a better written role.

Dominating the evening is Laura Pierpont, as the Justice's salty and sensible mother. During several brief and highly amusing appearances, she walks away with the applause.

"The Smile of the World" is a literate, honest study in human values, but for us it lacks the touch of humanity. We suspect that it is likely to draw a puzzled frown from Mr. and Mrs. Average Playgoer of the world. It should be an absorbing play. It could be a stimulating play. But it isn't. Probably because author-director Kanin has failed to make the members of his eternal triangle seem credible and alive.

***NEW YORK* STAR**

JANUARY 14, 1949

by John Lardner

Love and a Tired Liberal

Garson Kanin, a writer of marked talent, to put it mildly, foresook the comic note with which he has been most successful and made a first—and highly commendable—step into deeper meanings Wednesday night when his new play, *The Smile of the World*, opened for business at the Lyceum.

The result reminded me somewhat of a reporter's first story for a magazine. The author is tightened up. He is neither free nor easy nor able to do himself justice. He reaches for the past and proven formulas because he hesitates to strike out for himself and find new ones. Mr. Kanin's sincerity is intense, his point of view is intelligent, but too much of the time his theme and lines are overpoweringly familiar. There is a low, even, careful tone in *The Smile of the World* which brings the play perilously close to dullness and which I'm willing to bet the playwright will not repeat on his next trip to the post.

* * *

The Smile of the World deals with a U. S. Supreme Court Justice who has lapsed from a boldly liberal young manhood into a safely stuffy middle age. In doing so he has lost the respect of his wife; he quickly goes on to lose the respect and admiration of his law clerk. The wife and the clerk react to their loss by falling in love with each other. The judge accepts this situation in the manner of a wounded mule. He is hurt but stubborn, insisting that it is the natural by-product of an aging marriage and making things more unpleasant all around by referring to Justices Holmes and Brandeis, his colleagues, as "the katzenjammer kids." As you can see, political reaction goes hand in hand with marital infidelity and the death of love. While allowing the merit of that theory, I am disposed to resist the fixed and rather banal terms in which Mr. Kanin puts it. His Mr. and Mrs. Justice Boulting might well have gone the way they have if the judge had remained as liberal as, for instance, Mr. Justice Murphy.

There has been a run lately, as you know if you follow the theater or fiction in general, of smugly successful men who were active idealists in their youth—who yield, as John Morley, quoted by Mr. Kanin, says, to "this smile of the world, to win which we are bidden to sacrifice our moral manhood; this frown of the world, whose terrors are more awful than the withering up of truth, and the slow going out of light within the souls of us." That is an eloquent passage, as applicable today as ever, if not more so. I do not quarrel with Mr. Kanin for applying its message again. I only wish that his play shared some of the freshness and eloquence of Mr. Morley's prose.

* * *

His mouthpieces, the judge, the wife, the clerk, are too usual, too usually exaggerated and theatrical, in spite of their occasional flashes of intelligence and insight. The judge is preternaturally tired and smug. The wife is unconvincingly bright and brittle. The young man, 29 by the calendar, is callow beyond the powers of children of 12. Then there is the judge's mother, another in a long, long line of wisecrackers with hearts of gold, who walks with a Mae-Westian swing and makes the more jumpy spectators laugh by saying "where the hell do you thing you are?" A monograph could be written on the use of the words "hell" and "damn" by very old, very young, or very unworldly characters on the stage as a shock method of culling laughs.

Mr. Kanin has set *The Smile of the World* in the year 1923, presumably so as to avoid current Washington problems and make the details of the judge's illiberalism subordinate to the details of his home life. Mr. Justice Holmes is by way of being the play's offstage hero, as Bernard Baruch was in *Bravo!* On stage, Otto Kruger is anything but the man of force his wife calls him at the start of the first act, mostly because he is asked to be either terribly hurt, terribly tired, or downright asleep. Ruth Gordon, as his wife, tends to remind you of Miss Gordon in other plays, Warren Stevens, as the clerk, tries gamely to be no more simple-minded than his lines require, and is what you would call a comer.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 13, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

Objection!

IN HIS new drama of Washington doings, "The Smile of the World," Garson Kanin examines the mind and heart of a Supreme Court justice in 1923. It is no such show as "Born Yesterday." At the Lyceum, the author has written three listless acts of philosophical dissertations and romantic confusion. Otto Kruger plays a supposed associate of Justice Holmes with more force than conviction, while Kanin's wife, Ruth Gordon, is somewhat perplexed by the role of his errant and idealistic wife. As some gauge of the work's lack of dramatic substance, Laura Pierpont appears briefly as the tough and outspoken mother of the justice and steals the show, lock, stock and barrel.

• • •

The title stems from a John Morley quotation: "And what is this smile of the world, to win which we are bidden to sacrifice our moral manhood; this frown of the world, whose terrors are more awful than the withering up of truth, and the slow going out of light within the souls of us?" At times the author has composed indignant and eloquent variations on the theme, particularly when he is pillorying an erstwhile liberal for taking pride in being a reactionary and swinging a Supreme Court vote against the right of free speech. Too often he has engaged in judicial moralizing or has become involved in a hapless romance between a matron and her husband's young and fiery clerk. What little action there is has no persuasive resolution. "The Smile of the World" is a rather tedious theatrical tract.

• • •

Miss Pierpont is an utter delight. It is true that she has stinging lines, which are reminiscent of Kanin's uproarious dialogue in "Born Yesterday." But the actress herself makes a lusty and wise figure of an old woman who is repelled by her son's terrors before the frown of the world. It is a capital piece of performing, which makes for bright moments in a dull charade. There is a good bit, too, by Boris Marshalov, as a celebrated photographer who takes the justice's picture at the outset of the offering. The principals fare less well than their assistants.

• • •

Kruger gives a commanding characterization of the justice, but the man Kanin has imagined is so complicated and diffuse that his efforts are more oratorical than enlightening. Having given way to convention and success, the justice accepts his wife's infidelity as a matter of course and justifies his lack of integrity by citing legalistic cant. Miss Gordon brings warmth and sympathy to several scenes. The infatuation for a young man in whom she sees her husband at an earlier age finds her something less than assured. Warren Stevens plays the clerk with a very stiff neck. Kanin has staged his play adroitly enough, considering its lack of consequential matter, and Donald Oenslager has designed a handsome living room for the exhibit. "The Smile of the World" needs a lot more than decor to make it entertaining.

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 13, 1949

'Smile of the World' a Conflict Of Liberal and Conservative

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Through many of its passages and moods, "Smile of the World" achieves authentic intimacy in an unusual sense from the reality of its presentation. One believes the silent pauses in conversation, the interruptions cut short, and the charging of a room to high voltage with unspoken emotion.

As a story the play itself has the same reality, and this is what makes it less than effective theater. A situation evolves out of genuine human values and develops to a crux, with unaffected talk and next to no visual action whatsoever. Again true to much of life, it promises little more than the remotest resolution.

Granted that it is a play of character rather than of plot, still it suffers from lack of a dramatic pattern.

The Humdrum Life.

The middle-aged justice of the Supreme Court, Reuben Boulting, and his wife Sara have for some years been growing subtly apart. There is no passion, tenderness or real mutual interest left in their marriage. Suddenly Sara realizes why when the youthful Sam Penn is introduced into their lives as Reuben's new clerk.

Sam is fresh, inquisitive and idealistic. He believes in the great elementary statements of democracy and insists on knowing why they do not, or will not, work. Here again is the young man who knows how to pick up a cause when he believes in it, the young man Sara married.

Immediately she recognizes the bloodless "ambitious conformist" which Reuben has become. She is terrified at his position of influence when she realizes that human values mean nothing to him, and that his one aim is to interpret *literal* constitutionality of law so his own success and recognition are secure.

Reuben Doesn't Understand.

Reuben is too drowned in his selfish legalistic coolness to know what she is talking about, or to treat her affair with Sam as more than a middle-aged fling.

If there is a prayer for their marriage at the play's finish, it can only come after a long separation and some healthy flexing of Reuben's mental muscles.

Garson Kanin as author has posed a striking contrast in liberal and conservative thinking here, but despite the fact that his sympathies are clearly for the young, inquiring, vigorous mind there is no forceful stand taken nor any clear statement made of what he wants to say. The play never goes beyond the point of saying, "This exists." As a result it often is moving emotionally and not at all so intellectually.

Some Striking Aspects.

Productionally the play has striking aspects, as performances and direction combine to bring states of mind surely to life. The lines are often commonplace. People in love say the trite old things people in love do, yet all the emotion is there. Frequently a silent glance tells more than all the talk leading to it. The social inhibitions of these people are in the light, but their passions are felt.

Ruth Gordon brings warm humanity to Sara, who has no pretense of remarkability but has conviction and courage. The star's artful exaggeration achieves salient effects in this play. In a casual moment she may walk across a clear flat floor almost as if she were flailing her way with her elbows down a flight of crowded stairs. Then in emotional crisis, by gripping contrast she can express the deepest pathos or determination with a bare tilt of her head.

The play grows in balance from her characterization, and its humors respond willingly to her timing.

Balanced Performance.

The abuse served on Otto Kruger by the other characters might baffle a lesser actor, but he sustains an exact quality of supercilious assurance as the justice that makes him a figure people would be proud to meet, and no one would want very much to know.

Warren Stevens is always fresh and orderly as Sam. It is a talky role that could easily sound sophomoric or erratic, but remains normal and eager in his hands.

Laura Pierpont has an actress' dream in the role of the justice's straight-talking mother, whose every statement without exception is a laugh. In tribute, she enhances all those statements.

The New York Times

JANUARY 13, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In "The Smile of the World," which was acted at the Lyceum last evening, Garson Kanin points out that a progressive young man can easily grow into a stuffed shirt. To prove his point he offers a supreme court justice as the stuffed shirt and the justice's young law clerk as the man of progress.

To be frank about it, this is about all Mr. Kanin has to say in a rather pretentious and static play composed of polite shreds and patches. Although the production is opulent, the direction is at loose ends and the acting, including that of Ruth Gordon, is nebulous and vague. In spite of the fact that Mr. Kanin obviously has an idea for this play, "The Smile of the World" gives an impression of having no theme.

* * *

This is the same Mr. Kanin who has written "Born Yesterday," one of the most pithy and hilarious social comedies of the decade. In that cartoon about corruption in Washington, Mr. Kanin has a theme as well as vivid characters, and he has written it with gusto and earthiness. He has illustrated his ideas with concrete things that happen on the stage, which is quite a useful method of playwriting.

But "The Smile of the World" set in the living room of a Supreme Court justice, has none of these advantages. Justice Boulting began as a young man on fire with a passion for causes and that was why Sarah married him. As a Supreme Court justice, however, he is pedantic, pompous and reactionary. He bores his mother and disappoints Sarah. Sam Fenn, his young law clerk, is the sort of firebrand that Boulting was as a young man. Sarah falls in love with Sam for that reason.

Being a stuffed shirt, Boulting condones the affair and finally loses both Sarah and his law clerk. Mr. Kanin implies that the loss of Sarah may shock Boulting into exchanging the stuffed shirt for a hair shirt and becoming a man again.

* * *

By this time it does not really matter what happens to him. For "The Smile of the World" never comes to grips with the problem of ideas. It is composed of bits of casual dialogue with occasional orotund pronunciamentos, together with a few quotations, one of which is presumably in faultless classical Greek. With the exception of Boulting's salty-tongued mother, the characters are hardly more than attitudes.

As his own director, Mr. Kanin has staged the fussiest and busiest performance of the year 1949 to date. All the characters are continuously in flight from the monotony of the play. Donald Oenslager has designed a thoroughly livable private house interior. Mainbocher has designed suitably expensive clothes for Miss Gordon, and Forrest Thayer has taken the rest of the costume designing from there. Accordingly, everything looks plausible—in fact, downright classy.

* * *

If you are not absorbed by the play, it is no doubt only logical to find the acting disenchanting also. Miss Gordon plays Sarah like a twentieth-century Norah. In her revival of Ibsen that was one of her finest parts and performances. But it has a hollow ring in her current play. Otto Kruger plays the supercilious justice with his usual sharpness. Warren Stevens plays the young clerk like an educated juvenile. As the iconoclastic mother, Laura Pierpont is lucky enough to have the only actable part in the drama. She appreciates it and plays it well. The other parts are purely utilitarian. They are ably acted by Ossie Davis, Boris Marshalov, Elizabeth Dewing, Ruby Dee and Sam Jackson.

But no matter how earnestly they work, the performance never acquires much momentum. All message and no drama makes "The Smile of the World" a dull play.

Journal American

JANUARY 13, 1949

Witty and Literate Triangle at Lyceum

By ROBERT GARLAND

Those theatre-struck Kanins are at it again!

At the Lyceum where, only the other day, there was a fine first play by the Kanin known as Garson, there is a fine second play by the same playwright. And the first fine play, with Judy Holliday and John Alexander, has merely moved south to Henry Miller's Theatre.

The fine second play, "The Smile of the World," produced by the Playwrights' Company, has Mrs. Garson Kanin in it. Ruth Gordon, that is, who is a playwright on her own and an actress of distinction.

As for the Kanin known as Garson, he is also the director of his new play at the Lyceum. And the brother of the Kanin known as Michael, co-producer of "Goodbye, My Fancy," the Fay Kanin play running successfully at the Morosco with Madeleine Carroll as its star.

And the author of "Goodbye, My Fancy" has the Kanin known as Garson for brother-in-law. So it is not hard to see why I call these play-writing, play-acting, play-directing, play-producing Kanins "theatre-struck."

Especially when you recall that Mrs. Garson wrote and acted in "The Leading Lady" earlier this season. That, remember, was in October. And, if the theatre-struck Kanins will forgive me for bringing it up, I still admire that theatre-piece tremendously.

They must give it another chance some day!

* * *

Fine Comedy

While figuring these theatre-struck Kanins out—

"The Smile of the World," the second play by the Kanin known as Garson which opened last night at the Lyceum with the Mrs. Kanin known as Ruth Gordon co-starred with Otto Kruger, is as fine, if not as funny, as the "Born Yesterday" which, year by year, occupied the same theatre.

Although the earlier play was—and is—a not always light-minded comedy, the later play is more serious-minded throughout. Nowadays, Garson Kanin is concerned with the world's frown as well as the world's smile.

With John Morley he wants to know more about this "smile of the world, to win which we are bidden to sacrifice our moral manhood: this frown of the world, whose terrors are more awful than the withering up of truth, and the slow going out of light within the soul of us."

Restating the case of Norah, Thorwald and Doctor Rank, of Candida, James and Eugene Marchbanks and of all the triangular romantic rest of them, Garson Kanin creates his Sara, Reuben and Samuel Fenn.

These, a Justice's Wife, the Justice and the Justice's Secretary, he places in an impressive Donald Oenslager mansion on the outskirts of Washington, D. C. A civilized and literate triangle, they live and love and talk it out for three acts of brilliant social commentary . . .

But Sara is less iconoclastic than Nora or Candida!

* * *

But more right, I think, more realistic!

But it is as a 1923 conversation piece that Garson Kanin's "The Smile of the World" outshines his "Born Yesterday." Not of late has the local stage heard dialogue as sharp, as shining, as free of even the shadow of pretense, as the dialogue of this husband, wife and lover reproduction.

And, as the husband, wife and lover, Otto Kruger, Ruth Gordon and Warren Stevens could not be better. They, and Laura Pierpont as the husband's outspoken mother, are well up among the outstanding actors of the season.

When, in 1937, Miss Gordon was playing Norah to the Thorwald of Dennis King and the Doctor Rank of Paul Lucas in Thornton Wilder's acting version of "A Doll's House," she was readying herself for Sara Boulting. It is a memorable job: honest, sustained, Mainbochered to perfection.

Mr. Kruger's is no easy role. His Justice Reuben Boulting is as honest and sustained as Miss Gordon's Sara. The shirt may be stuffed, but the heart within is on the right side and as human as such a heart can be.

Warren Stevens as Mr. Justice Boulting's secretary and Mrs. Justice Boulting's lover, is excellent and engaging. And Laura Pierpont as Alice Widmayer is simply grand. Both as playwright and director, the Kanin known as Garson does himself and the theatre proud in this, his second fine play . . .

"The Smile of the World" is wise and wry and welcome.

New York Post
HOME NEWS

JANUARY 13, 1949

'Smile of the World' A Disappointment

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

In "The Smile of the World," which opened at the Lyceum last night, Garson Kanin is concerned with the everlasting problem of the tired liberal and the ironic course of nature by which the man who, in his youth, had fought courageously and idealistically for human freedom becomes, in his middle years, a compromiser and mocker of his youthful dreams. It is a subject of particular interest in a tired post-war world, and Mr. Kanin, being both a craftsman and an author of sensibility, has given it frequent humor and insight. But it is a strangely drab and lifeless play, lacking in incisiveness and dramatic bite.

If you want comparisons with other plays, there is a touch in it of "Good-bye, My Fancy," which Mr. Kanin's sister-in-law wrote, of "Candida" and of "A Doll's House." There is also a kind of reverse reflection of "The Magnificent Yankee," since the author's central character is a 1923 Supreme Court Justice, and the first indication given that he has lost his liberal birthright is the discovery that he has deep scorn for Holmes and Brandeis. In fact, the great Justice Holmes is the absent hero of the play, and it is his disagreement with Holmes over a civil liberties case that dramatizes Justice Boulting's fall into reaction.

The Mother

For his narrative, Mr. Kanin has taken the conflict between the once-liberal Boulting and his disillusioned wife, who sees in a young law clerk the qualities of searching idealism her husband had once possessed and proceeds to fall in love with him. "The Smile of the World" contemplates the rift between the youthful dream and the smug compromise of middle age with considerable compassion and a trace of rueful pity, but it is only in the third act that the situation becomes dramatic and only in the character of a wonderfully salty old mother, who seems to have wandered in from "Born Yesterday," that it comes to full life.

Despite his attempt to be fair and even sympathetic to the aging jurist, it seems to me that Mr. Kanin has rather stacked the cards against Justice Boulting. For all of Otto Kruger's splendid playing of the role, the part is too stuffy and pompous for comfort, and the case for him is never really effectively stated. And when age appears to be made chiefly responsible for his loss of a fighting liberal spirit, it may be recalled that both Holmes and Brandeis were older men than Justice Boulting, and one even remembers that Franklin D. Roosevelt was considerably senior to young Thomas E. Dewey.

A Contrast

What chiefly made me unhappy over "The Smile of the World," however, is its lack of dramatic vitality. It may be unfair to recall Mr. Kanin's brilliant "Born Yesterday," which sought and achieved a different kind of point and effect, but the earlier play not only had tremendous spirit and vividness, but was far more persuasive in putting over the serious ideas it had to present than this graver and more sedate drama. It is worth repeating that the robustly humorous character of the jurist's mother, hilariously played by Laura Pierpont, provides by far the brightest spot in the evening.

The part of the disappointed wife is played by Ruth Gordon with her characteristic skill, and the young clerk is believably portrayed by Warren Stevens, but the wistful romance between them is never very credible nor very touching. It seems a great waste, too, to find Ossie Davis, one of the finest young actors on the American stage, whose performance in "Jeb" is memorable, playing the bit part of a family retainer. Mr. Kanin's direction and Donald Oenslager's set are impeccable, but the final effect is disappointing.

The Sun

JANUARY 13, 1949

Garson Kanin's 'The Smile of the World' Has Premiere at Lyceum.

Garson Kanin has turned back to Washington in the months right after the death of Warren G. Harding in "The Smile of the World," which had its premiere last evening at the Lyceum Theater under the sponsorship of the Playwrights' Company. He hit a much higher level as a dramatist when he was dealing with the nation's capital of a more recent day in "Born Yesterday."

Kanin's new play has some tense and provocative moments, and some laughs here and there as well, but too often for its own good "The Smile of the World" finds its action snagged by sheer debate. This is particularly true in a slow first act. After that Kanin strikes fire more frequently, and his final act is the best of the three.

His plot this time is built around a member of the Supreme Court. Justice Reuben Boulting in his younger days out in Ohio had his sights set toward the stars. Now as a justice in his fifties he is smug, convention-ridden, and reactionary. Justice Holmes's decisions stir in him only contempt.

In the fall of 1923 he draws as his law clerk a youthful idealist. The Judge's wife quickly sees in the earnest newcomer a duplicate of her husband as he was when she first knew him. She and the young lawyer are attracted to each other and before long find themselves in love. Her efforts to save her marriage and swing her husband back onto a path he once trod furnish the framework on which Kanin hangs some fervent discussion of government and the law courts. Not all of the play's notes escape hollowness in 1949.

There is nothing wrong, however, with the acting. Ruth Gordon's playing of the jurist's wife is superb. Her portrayal has tenderness and depth and just the restraint needed to make Sara Boulting the wise and understanding figure she should be. Otto Kruger is always convincing as the representative of the Supreme Court and his acting lends force to the closing scenes. The role of the law clerk falls to Warren Stevens, and in the sincerity of his performance he adds to the laurels he won earlier this season in "Sundown Beach." There is no greater triumph scored by any one, however, than that of Laura Pierpont as Boulting's frank and gusty mother, who is deeply troubled by the change in her distinguished son. The play picks up sharply when she appears in the second act.

The author has done his own staging. He handles the major scenes excellently but at times Kanin, the director, is clearly hampered by Kanin, the playwright.

The play takes its title from a quotation by the British statesman John Morley, which begins: "And what is this smile of the world to win which we are bidden to sacrifice our moral manhood——" Kanin in his writing fails to scale the heights of his theme. HERRICK BROWN.